

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge  
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<http://www.fws.gov/okefenokee>

# News Release



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## National Water Trail Designation for Okefenokee Trails

On Monday, July 16, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar designated the wilderness canoe trail system at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge as a National Water Trail.

“Restoring our nation’s rivers and expanding outdoor recreational activities on them is one of the major goals of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative,” Salazar said. “Through a national network of National Water Trails, we are not only connecting people to the outdoors and supporting conservation efforts for our scenic rivers, but also supporting tourism and the recreation economy in nearby communities.”

Water trails are recreational routes on waterways with a network of public access points supported by broad-based community partnerships. They provide both conservation and recreational opportunities. The National Water Trails System is a network of exemplary water trails that are cooperatively supported and sustained.

The 120-mile-long Okefenokee Wilderness Canoe Trail offers a unique experience in a National Wilderness Area. Refuge staff are actively clearing and opening trails after two years of drought and damage from the Honey Prairie Fire. Visitors will find multiple trails available for varying degrees of experience; from one to five days in length. Each trail provides abundant opportunities for viewing wildlife.

A canoe trip through the Okefenokee Swamp is an experience that you will remember for a lifetime. Alligators glide through the water stained dark with tannic acid. Herons and sandhill cranes wade through tall grasses and water lilies. Bears meander through hammocks and islands. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is a haven for these and other animals—over 402,000 acres of wet prairies, cypress forests, and pine uplands.

Since the Okefenokee Swamp serves as the headwaters for the 130-mile-long St. Marys and the 230-mile-long Suwannee River there is potential to expand the National Water Trail designation for a network of trails from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico.

“In addition to the possible expansion of the designated water trail,” Refuge Manager Curt McCasland said. “We are interested in strengthening the coordination of local and federal agencies to monitor, restore and conserve water resources in the St. Marys and Suwannee River watersheds.”

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